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Edmund Schlink

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Edmund Schlink

# Ecumenical and Confessional Writings

The Coming Christ and Church Tradition  
After the Council

edited by Matthew L. Becker



Edmund Schlink Works

Volume 1

V&R Academic

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# Edmund Schlink Ecumenical and Confessional Writings

Volume 1

The Coming Christ and Church Traditions  
After the Council

Edited by Matthew L. Becker

Translated by Matthew L. Becker and Hans G. Spalteholz

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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## Foreword to the German Edition

Whoever reads Edmund Schlink's writings discovers their abiding significance and contemporary relevance. When the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the declaration *Dominus Iesus* three years ago<sup>[i]</sup> and the ecumenical dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church became much more difficult, Schlink's book on the council was an important discussion resource for me. His chapter on the Decree on Ecumenism from Vatican II serves as a knowledgeable guide to Roman Catholic ecclesiology and provides criteria for the critical examination needed for it. What becomes clear, above all, is that the prerequisite for a serious ecumenical dialogue is the willingness, at the very start, to be open, for the time being at least, to God's activity in the other churches, rather than from the start to be judgmental about them. This remains one of the strongest ecumenical driving forces which accompanied Schlink throughout his life. One finds it again and again in the most diverse contributions he made from completely different periods of his life.

Edmund Schlink promoted the relation of theology to other fields of study. He appropriated insights from psychology and philosophy, from the natural sciences, and from cultural studies. As a systematic theologian he made frequent reference to the exegetical disciplines and to the history of dogma in the ancient church. The diversity of issues within and beyond the discipline of theology gave his thought a breadth that makes it especially attractive. The diversity of his thought, moreover, is just as evident as the inner coherence of the topics treated from various fields of study. There is a red thread that runs through Schlink's numerous publications, from the early dissertation, *The Human Being in the Preaching of the Church*, to the *Ecumenical Dogmatics*, which appeared shortly before he died. The question, "What is a human being?" [*Was ist der Mensch?*], was his great theme, perhaps even his life's theme. What he wrote in an insightful personal remembrance about Julia von Bodelschwingh, the wife of the director of the Bethel Institutions, Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, characterizes not only the outline of his theological anthropology but also his ecclesiology and his passionate interest in ecumenical matters: "In her thinking she was never satisfied with the established and the familiar, but in a surprisingly original and unbiased way she inquired into why things are the way they are. While staying entirely focused on Bethel, she nevertheless at the same time went above and beyond what was already occurring there. Devoting herself entirely to the people at Bethel, she sought for what was not yet a reality in their lives."<sup>[ii]</sup> Schlink wanted likewise to be devoted to the separated churches and to discern in them

a fullness which was not yet realized in an actual confessional form. It was precisely the Lutheran Confession, so he was convinced, that enables the separated churches to seek and discover one another as churches of Jesus Christ, and to come to live in the full breadth of the church of Jesus Christ.

This first volume of Edmund Schlink's works brings together two books, *The Coming Christ and Church Traditions: Essays for the Dialogue among the Separated Churches* and *After the Council*. They belong together even though they were originally published separately. The essays in the first book are more than preliminary studies for the *Ecumenical Dogmatics*, and the second book on the Second Vatican Council is more than the formal report of the official German Protestant observer at that council. What is needed for productive ecumenical dialogue is substantive scholarship in dogmatics and the history of dogma. This is just what these multifaceted texts provide. Beyond that, Edmund Schlink himself was convinced: If the goal of uniting the separated churches is in earnest, then no church can remain as it is now. For that reason, at the very start of every ecumenical endeavor—at the global, regional, or local level—there must be repentance for each church body's intransigence and the widespread sense of ecclesiological entitlement. In one of the last chapters of his book on the Second Vatican Council, Schlink speaks of "anxious Christendom" [*ängstlichen Christenheit*]. Ecumenical zeal is good, but it does not overcome that angst. That can only happen through "the mercy of Christ." Here beats the very heart of Schlink's theology. It is from the action of Christ that we need to come really to know our own church and the other churches. Schlink will then later speak, in the *Ecumenical Dogmatics*, of the "Copernican revolution in the consideration of Christendom." Christ—and not one's own church—must be the criterion for truly perceiving and evaluating the other churches.

This first volume makes accessible the important essay, "The Structure of the Dogmatic Statement as an Ecumenical Issue." As Edmund Schlink worked on this in 1957, he entered into new territory. He allowed anthropological criteria, such as modes of thinking and forms of language, as well as insights from linguistics and the psychology of thinking, to shed light on dogmatic and ecumenical reflection. He understood the differences within the New Testament—for example, between the Pauline and Johannine writings—not only as "differences in conceptuality and historical context, but also as differences in their author's modes of thinking."

The book *After the Council* describes the four periods of the Second Vatican Council, together with its hopes and surprises, its breakthroughs and setbacks. It is a small compendium of Roman Catholic ecclesiology. One learns what constitutes the difference between an assembly of the World Council of Churches and a council of the Roman Catholic Church. One learns what constitutions, decrees, and declarations are. One is astonished at the bold scale and intensity with which the official observers from the other churches were involved in the preparation of important texts and resolutions.

In controversial theological discussions with the Roman Catholic Church, the question is often raised: “Well, what has come of your council with its ecumenical openness?” Whoever reads Schlink’s book on the council carefully will not stop with this question, for it must likewise be asked: “How have we in our own church responded to the council? Are we merely sitting back, or are we challenged toward our own renewal?” At the end of the book Schlink writes, “Beyond that, however, it is correct to say that none of the churches can remain exactly as it is; in every case, a renewal and an unfolding of catholicity, that is, a return to God and a turning toward the other churches, is needed.” These are important driving forces in the ecumenical theology of Edmund Schlink, on which we are still dependent even after forty years.

On 6 March 2003 Edmund Schlink would have been 100 years old. A group of his students is preparing a multi-volume edition of the most important works that are either out of print or difficult to acquire. The edition will contain the following volumes: *Ecumenical and Confessional Writings*; *Ecumenical Dogmatics*; *The Doctrine of Baptism*; *The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*; and *Sermons and Essays*. Each volume will contain an introduction that identifies aspects of the historical influence of the works published in that volume. In this first volume Jochen Eber has provided a biographical introduction.<sup>[iii]</sup> He situates the most important works by Edmund Schlink in relation to the course of Schlink’s life and the context in which they originated, their life-setting [*Sitz im Leben*].

Karlsruhe, April 2003

Klaus Engelhardt

### Editor’s Notes

- [i] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church” (Vatican City: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, August 6, 2000), available on the Vatican’s website, accessed on 22 April 2014, [vatican.va, vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents](http://vatican.va/vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents).
- [ii] Edmund Schlink, “Erinnerungen an eine jugendliche Gestalt (Julia von Bodelschwingh)” [Memories of a Youthful Woman], *Frauen in Bethel: Acht Frauengestalten aus vergangener Zeit*, ed. Gottfried Michaelis (Melle: Knoth, 2000), 7.
- [iii] See Jochen Eber, “Edmund Schlink 1903–1984: Ein Leben für die Einheit der Kirche,” in *Schriften zu Ökumene und Bekenntnis*, vol. 1 (*Der kommende Christus und die kirchlichen Traditionen; Nach dem Konzil*), ed. Klaus Engelhardt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), xi–xxii. This excellent German introduction served as the principal resource for the editor’s introduction that is included in the present volume.

## Preface to the American Edition

In 2004 Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht marked the centennial anniversary of the birth of Edmund Schlink and the twentieth anniversary of his death by publishing the first of five volumes that contain his principal theological writings, *Schriften zu Ökumene und Bekenntnis*. The final volume appeared in 2010.

In January 2012 Jörg Persch, the editorial director for theology and religion at Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, invited me to begin an American edition of these volumes. I am grateful to him and to the Schlink family for entrusting me with this important project. I am also grateful to the editors of the German edition: Klaus Engelhardt, Günther Gassmann, Rolf Herrfahrdt, Michael Plathow, Ursula Schnell, and Peter Zimmerling.

Although nearly all of Edmund Schlink's writings in this first volume of the American edition have been available in English for several decades, the publication of the new German edition offered a significant impetus for providing a fresh and more accurate translation of them. Key terms are now translated consistently. Infelicitous and misleading renderings of Schlink's language into English, which more or less happened in the earlier versions, have been corrected. Technical theological terms and concepts received special attention so that their English equivalents are as accurate as possible. Sentences, footnotes, and entire paragraphs that, for whatever reason, were omitted have now been restored. Unlike the abridged English edition of *Der kommende Christus und die kirchlichen Traditionen*, which was published in 1967, this new edition includes all of the essays that appeared in the original book, published in 1961.

Working with Dr. Hans Spalteholz, emeritus professor of English and theology at Concordia University, Portland, Oregon, has been a great joy and privilege and not merely a collaborative labor of love. As a native German speaker, who also served for thirty-five years as a pastor to a German-speaking congregation in Portland, Prof. Spalteholz brought crucial, invaluable expertise to this project. I am truly grateful for the help he has provided me. I do, however, take full responsibility for the finished product.

We have attempted to be as faithful to Schlink's original language and polished style as context and word usage permitted. In general, we have tried to be "as literal as possible" and "as free as necessary." On occasion, we have not hesitated to borrow felicitous phrases and apt expressions from earlier translations of Schlink's works and those of other German writers. We have employed gender-inclusive language to the extent that such use was possible without misrepresenting what the author communicated or forcing his

language to fit later church developments (for example, regarding the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry; cf. sec. 4 of chap. 8 [“Apostolic Succession”] in Book One below). We believe that were Dr. Schlink alive today he would use such inclusive language, given his strong emphasis on the inclusivity of the whole church within the one body of Christ.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Where Schlink’s versification from Luther’s Bible differs from the NRSV’s, I have placed the latter’s verse numbers in brackets. All quotations from the official documents of the Second Vatican Council are based on the English versions that appear on the official website of the Vatican (Vatican.va). Nevertheless, I have also freely made use of the Latin and English versions that appear in Denzinger and Tanner.<sup>1</sup> Where Schlink’s German translations of these documents differ significantly from the online English versions, I have compared the German and all available English renderings with the Latin and made whatever adjustments were necessary.

The only material not included here is the biographical essay by Dr. Jochen Eber, which was published in the first volume of the German edition. That essay has been replaced by my own introduction, which is partly based on Dr. Eber’s very helpful research.

Footnotes by Schlink appear as normal footnotes in the text (identified by plain superscripted arabic numerals), in a sequence that is identical to the German original (unless otherwise noted). On rare occasions where an incorrect or incomplete title or date appears in the footnotes, these have been corrected and missing publication information supplied. The other, infrequent mistakes in the original citations have been silently rectified. Whenever possible, references to existing English translations of works cited by Schlink are included. If a German work has not been published in English, a translation of its title is placed in brackets immediately after the German title. All translations of quoted German works are mine, unless otherwise noted. Notes added in their entirety in the American edition appear at the end of each chapter and are identified in the text by superscripted roman numerals in brackets. On occasion, an editorial insertion will be included in the body of the text or within one of Schlink’s footnotes. These editorial insertions are placed in brackets and marked at the end with the abbreviation “Ed.,” to make clear that they are my notes, not Schlink’s. Numbers that appear in brackets, either in the text or in footnotes, refer to the page number(s) from the English translation of a given work. Each volume contains indexes of Scripture references, names, and subjects.

1 Henrich Denzinger, ed., *Enchiridion symbolorum: definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum/Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd ed., ed. Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012); Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown, 1990). I have followed Tanner’s lead in using gender-inclusive language whenever possible.

The layout of the American edition retains Schlink's divisions of chapters, sections, and paragraphs. All Greek and Latin terms have been kept in the text and an English translation of the less familiar ones appears in brackets. On occasion Schlink's original German term or phrase is placed in brackets immediately after the English translation, usually because the word or phrase is a technical expression or its etymological roots are significant. I have maintained most instances where Schlink placed quotation marks around certain German words and phrases (and have usually then placed the original word or phrase in brackets after the translation). Where Schlink refers to a word as a word, I have placed that word in italics, not in quotation marks. Material placed in parentheses, either in the body of the text or in footnotes, unless otherwise noted, is original to Schlink's text.

A few remarks on certain specifics of the translation may be of some help to the reader. Normally *church* with a small-case *c* refers to "the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" or "the church of Jesus Christ," which cannot be strictly identified with any one church body or denomination. (The Latin designation for this, the *una sancta* confessed in the Latin form of the Nicene Creed, will likewise be small-case.) When *Church* appears with a large-case *C*, this term refers to a specific church body (for example, the Roman Catholic Church), a church tradition (for example, the Eastern Orthodox Church), or to a federation of churches (for example, The Protestant Church in Germany).

The word *Anfechtung* is an important term in the Lutheran theological tradition. Luther occasionally used it to translate the Latin term *tentatio*, that is, "spiritual crisis" or "turmoil" or "trial." Luther understood it also in the sense of "being attacked" or "being assailed" by forces opposed to Christ, the gospel, and the church. In such a context, one is being tempted to reject faith in Christ and to despair of God and oneself. So the term can also be translated as "temptation," although that lacks the aspect of "attack." The term will occasionally be left untranslated (as in the seventh chapter of Book One below, where Schlink defines it), or it will be rendered as "spiritual attack and trial." The antidote to such attack, according to both Luther and Schlink, is solely the gospel promise and the comfort it brings to the one who trusts it in faith.

While it would be nice to preserve Martin Luther's use and understanding of the term *evangelisch* (that is, oriented toward the *evangel* or *good news* of Jesus Christ), this word has come to mean something quite different in the United States from what it originally meant to sixteenth-century "evangelicals." Therefore, to avoid misunderstanding, this German adjective will normally be translated as "Protestant" or "Evangelical-Lutheran," depending on the context.

When used in reference to the worship service, the word *Ordnung* will be translated as "order," since it typically refers to the order of service in the liturgy. When used to refer to the organization and administration of those who serve in a given ministry of the church, this word will be translated as "ordering," since it typically refers here to the ordering or arranging of

ministerial offices (as, for example, in the context of discussions about “faith and order”). When modified by the adjective *kirchenrechtlich*, the word *Ordnung* can refer to “canon law” (as in both the Eastern and Western Christian traditions), “church law” (as in the organization and administration of a given Protestant territorial church), or even “church regulations” (as in a church constitution, its ordinances and bylaws, as well as its formal agreements and legal obligations).

Given the confused and weakened state of Christian ecumenism today, which some have described as an “ecumenical winter,” one might hope that a re-examination of the key theological writings of one of the great ecumenists of the twentieth century might assist efforts at renewing the ecumenical movement, especially regarding issues of “faith and order” which have been marginalized in recent decades. Since many of the theological issues with which Schlink wrestled are still pressing upon us today, our own thinking about them might be benefited by his. His reflections on the Second Vatican Council, among the first to be published in the wake of that historic event, are still apropos, more than fifty years after their appearance. His incisive, yet respectful theological criticism of the Roman Church (his preferred way of referring to that church body) seems as relevant today as it did in the late-1960s.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife and son for their loving support and for their patience during the time I worked on this project.

Valparaiso University  
Feast of Pentecost 2016

Matthew L. Becker





## Edmund Schlink (1903–1984): An Ecumenical Life<sup>1</sup>

Matthew L. Becker

An influential teacher, pastor, and professor, and a leading participant in numerous official ecumenical dialogues for more than forty years, Edmund Schlink was one of the most significant Christian theologians of the twentieth century. The author of a weighty dogmatics text, five additional important books, and numerous essays, sermons, and addresses, this second-generation “ecumenical pioneer of the 20th Century” was the central systematic and historical theologian at Heidelberg University between 1946 and his death in 1984.<sup>2</sup> Lauded as a “teacher of the church,” as a “forerunner of the Ecumenical Movement in the 20th Century,” and as “a quiet reformer” who “lived his life for the unity of the church,” Schlink’s contribution to the development of ecumenical theology in the second half of the twentieth century was considerable.<sup>3</sup> In the words of one of his most well-known students, “By connecting such ecumenical breadth with a forceful emphasis on the abiding authority of the apostolic confession of Christ, the theological works of Edmund Schlink, and especially his *Ecumenical Dogmatics*, are still exemplary guides today.”<sup>4</sup> The recent publication of these principal writings in a new German edition offers a further reason to re-examine Schlink’s life and literary output, especially given the fact that many English-speaking students of

1 The following includes material from my essay, “Edmund Schlink (1903–1984),” in *Twentieth-Century Lutheran Theologians*, ed. Mark Mattes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 195–222.

2 Günther Gassmann, “Edmund Schlink—An Ecumenical Pioneer of the 20th Century,” *Ecumenical Trends* 33 (2004), 6–10.

3 Michael Plathow, “Edmund Schlink—Lehrer der Kirche: Doxologische und poetische Theologie,” *Badische Pfarrerblätter* (March 2003), 61–65 (here 61); Christoph Schwöbel, “Ökumenische Dogmatik: Zum 100. Geburtstag von Edmund Schlink am 6. März 2003,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 52 (2003), 244–58 (here 254); Eugene M. Skibbe, *A Quiet Reformer: An Introduction to Edmund Schlink’s Life and Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 1999); and Jochen Eber, “Edmund Schlink 1903–1984: Ein Leben für die Einheit der Kirche,” *SÖB* 1:xi–xxi (here xi). For additional biographical information on Schlink, see especially Eber’s doctoral dissertation, *Einheit der Kirche als dogmatisches Problem bei Edmund Schlink*, *Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie*, vol. 67, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg and Reinhard Slenczka (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 18–50; and Klaus Engelhardt, “Biographische Reminiszenz zu Edmund Schlink,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 52 (2003), 242–44.

4 Wolfhart Pannenberg, Foreword to the *Ecumenical Dogmatics*, ÖD ix.

religious studies, including younger American theologians, may be unfamiliar with this important German Protestant.

### Early Years and Education

Edmund Schlink was born on 6 March 1903 in Darmstadt, the capital city of Hessen, south of Frankfurt. His only other sibling, Klara (1904–2001), was born one year later.<sup>5</sup> His mother, Ella (1877–1969), came from a family that had been heavily influenced by Herrnhuter Pietism. His father, Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Schlink (1875–1968), who had been raised Roman Catholic but then became Lutheran, was a professor of mechanics and aeronautical technology at the Technical College (*Hochschule*) of Darmstadt, later at the Technical College of Braunschweig, where he also served as rector, and finally back at Darmstadt (after 1921). As a child and young student, Edmund Schlink was interested in literature, philosophy, and music. In Braunschweig he attended the *Wilhelm Gymnasium* (preparatory high school) and also took violin lessons. He even directed a student orchestra there.<sup>6</sup> In her spiritual autobiography Klara recalls how she and her brother enjoyed browsing local bookstores in search of answers to their deepest questions. They spent much time reading such philosophers as Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900).<sup>7</sup>

After completing his university entrance exam in 1922, he studied one term at the University of Tübingen before transferring to the University of Munich (1922–24) where, like his father, he initially concentrated on mathematics and the natural sciences (especially physics). He also studied philosophy, art, and psychology. Following the German custom of listening to the best professors in one's field at several universities before writing one's dissertation, he then studied at Kiel (1924), Vienna (1924–25), and Marburg (1925–27). Eventually he completed his Ph.D. dissertation in psychology and submitted it to the faculty of Marburg in 1927.<sup>8</sup> This work explores personality changes in those

5 After her initial education in schools in Braunschweig and Darmstadt, Klara studied at the Fröbel Seminary in Kassel and “the Inner Missions” (*Inneremission*) school for girls in Berlin. In 1929 she became a teacher in the Mission House Malche in Bad Freienwalde. She then studied psychology, philosophy, and art history at the universities of Berlin and Hamburg. In 1947 she and Erika Madauss (1904–99) established The Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary in Darmstadt. At her ordination as a nun Klara took the name Mother Basilea. Later she wrote several devotional books, including a spiritual autobiography, *Wie ich Gott erlebte... Sein Weg mit mir durch sieben Jahrzehnte* [How I Experienced God..., His Way with Me through Seven Decades], 3rd ed. (Darmstadt: Ev. Marienschwesternschaft, 1980).

6 Eber, *Einheit*, 18.

7 Klara (Mutter Basilea) Schlink, *Wie ich Gott erlebte*, 26.

8 Edmund Schlink, *Persönlichkeitsänderung in Bekehrungen und Depressionen: Eine empirisch-religionspsychologische Untersuchung. Nebst kasuistischen Beiträgen zur Psychologie des Gotteserlebens als Anhang* [Personality Change in Conversions and Depression: An Empirical Study in

who experience a religious conversion and in those who suffer clinical depression. Partly as a result of this study, which also explores issues in natural religion, he was promoted to lecturer in philosophy at Marburg on 27 June 1929, although he never actually taught there.

A year prior to the completion of this initial dissertation, he himself underwent a religious conversion after suffering a crisis of faith.<sup>9</sup> Although he rarely spoke about this experience, even to his family, in his retirement he recounted that period of his life to some students who had asked him about it:

We young people after the First World War were disturbed by questions like: What is life? What meaning does life have? One would read a lot of Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche, great influences on my restless generation. Restless in this way, and wanting somehow to answer the question about the meaning of life, I sat in on some lectures on medicine and law, and also on the history of religions, disturbed by the question, “Why live at all?”—because I hoped in this way to get an answer to the question about the meaning of life. But in my case it was this way: the longer I studied philosophy, the further I was from an answer, and because of that I entered into a genuine existential crisis of meaning. For that reason, I took a year off and worked as a hired hand on a Silesian farm. Out of this crisis, then, I found my way to Christian faith and decided to study theology.<sup>10</sup>

During his time off from the university, he came into close contact with Christians who had been influenced by the Lutheran mystic Jakob Böhme (1575–1624). In particular, a conversation with Pastor Dr. Carl Eichhorn (1855–1934), who in his retirement served a Christian convalescent home, was also instrumental in helping Schlink to overcome his crisis and to steer him in the direction of Christian faith and theology.<sup>11</sup> That spring, in 1926, he returned to Darmstadt, resumed his studies at Marburg (where he also began to study theology more intensively), completed his dissertation in religious psychology under the direction of Eric Rudolf Jaensch (1883–1940), and then turned his full attention toward seeking to understand the Christian faith.

After a short period of study at Bethel Seminary, near Bielefeld in Westphalia, he transferred to the University of Münster in late 1927 in order to

the Psychology of Religion with an Appendix Containing Casuistic Contributions toward the Psychology of the Experience of God] (Phil. diss., University of Marburg, 1927). A portion of this 211-page dissertation was published under the same title in *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie* 70 (1929), 1/2:81–118. Klara also wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on a religious-psychological theme, namely, the significance of the consciousness of sin in the religious struggles of adolescent girls.

9 Eber, *Einheit*, 19. Schlink’s sister had also experienced a religious conversion in August 1922. See Klara (Mutter Basilea) Schlink, *Wie ich Gott erlebte*, 30.

10 Edmund Schlink, “Vortrag von Prof. Edmund Schlink im Ökumenischen Studentenheim am ‘Hausabend’ des Heims,” tape-recorded by H. Plathow (6 May 1979) and transcribed by Irmgard Schlink (the translation here differs slightly from that by Skibbe, *A Quiet Reformer*, 137).

11 Eber, “Edmund Schlink 1903–1984,” xi.

listen to the most well-known European theologian of the time, Karl Barth (1886–1968). Here Schlink encountered his first ecumenical problems, as he heard the Reformed theologian lecture on ethics and theological anthropology—and criticize elements in the Lutheran dogmatic tradition, especially in the area of Christology. After four semesters of study and research in Münster, where he also heard lectures by Roman Catholic theologians, he completed his theological dissertation in 1930 under Barth’s direction. This second of his doctoral dissertations explores “emotional experiences of God” as “an empirical-psychological contribution to the issue of natural religion.”<sup>12</sup> Upon completing this work and passing his theological examinations in Münster and Darmstadt (he received the rare mark of “excellent” [*vorzüglich*] on his first exam and was awarded *summa cum laude* after the oral portion), he was promoted to lecturer in Münster in February 1931. On this occasion he delivered a public lecture on the concept of teleology and its continuing significance for Christian theology, later published in the principal journal of German systematic theology.<sup>13</sup>

### Initial Teaching and Pastoral Activities

After finishing his second dissertation but before he was promoted to lecturer in Münster, Schlink chose to enter the “preachers’ seminary” (*Predigerseminar*) at Friedberg in order to prepare himself for pastoral ministry. In December 1931 he was ordained and began immediately to serve as an assistant pastor to two congregations near Frankfurt. Here he had his first run-in with the Nazi Party because he refused to transport the *Winterhilfswerk* that had been entrusted to him by the Party.<sup>14</sup> A year later he began serving as a campus pastor at the Technical College in Darmstadt, the same place where his father had taught for so many years. In addition to giving lectures to students and faculty on the fundamental questions and issues of the Christian faith, he also discussed with them such matters as the relation of Christ to technology and the problems of German nationalism.

While serving in Darmstadt he kept in close contact with the theology faculty at Giessen, and in 1933 he was invited to become a teaching assistant (*Repentent*) there in order to complete a *third* dissertation (his second

12 Edmund Schlink, *Emotionale Gotteserlebnisse: Ein empirisch-psychologischer Beitrag zum Problem der natürlichen Religion* [Emotional Experiences of God: An Empirical-Psychological Contribution on the Issue of Natural Religion], *Abhandlungen und Monographien zur Philosophie des Wirklichen* 5 (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1931).

13 Edmund Schlink, “Zum Begriff des Teleologischen und seiner augenblicklichen Bedeutung für die Theologie” [On the Concept of the Teleological and Its Present Significance for Theology], *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 10 (1933), 94–125.

14 Eber, *Einheit*, 21. *Winterhilfswerk* was a Nazi project of public aid for poor people, which was partly instituted to present a positive image of the Nazis within German society.

*theological* thesis, the *Habilitationsschrift*) that would allow him to become an official professor of theology in a German university. This post-doctoral thesis in theological anthropology examines how human beings have been understood in the preaching of the church.<sup>15</sup> It was submitted to the Giessen faculty in July 1934, and thus it paved the way for him to be called to that faculty as an un-established university lecturer (*Privatdozent*) of dogmatic and practical theology. Due to pressure from the Nazi secret police (Gestapo), however, which was exerted against him because of his activity in the Confessing Church and because he had publicly criticized the racist leaders of the *Deutsche Christen* (DC) in a sermon, he was removed from this teaching position after only one semester (winter 1934–35).<sup>16</sup>

A positive outcome of this time in Giessen, however, was the life-long friendship that began there with his fellow faculty member, the systematic theologian Peter Brunner (1900–81), with whom he had taught a course on the Lutheran Confessions. Like Schlink, Brunner had also been removed from his university position as a consequence of his opposition to the activities of the DC. As the pastor of a small congregation near Giessen, he had opposed the efforts of the DC to take over the congregation. As a result of his words and actions, he was denounced as anti-Nazi, and eventually spent four months in the Dachau concentration camp in 1935. When Brunner returned from prison to resume his pastorate, Schlink kept the DC pastor who had been sent by the Nazified church administration from entering the congregation and assuming leadership.<sup>17</sup> During these difficult years, he and Brunner, like several others,

15 Edmund Schlink, *Der Mensch in der Verkündigung der Kirche* [The Human Being in the Proclamation of the Church: A Dogmatic Investigation] (Hab. diss., University of Giessen, 1934). This work forms the first part of an expanded, three-part book that Schlink later published under the same title: Edmund Schlink, *Der Mensch in der Verkündigung der Kirche: Eine dogmatische Untersuchung* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1936).

16 Eber, *Einheit*, 21; Skibbe, *A Quiet Reformer*, 28. At the end of May 1934, the Synod that met in Barmer issued its *Theological Declaration* (the so-called “Barmer Declaration”). This document, initially drafted by Barth and then edited and augmented by several Lutheran theologians, spoke against the *Deutsche Christen* (DC), namely, those German Christians who wanted to control the twenty-eight regional Protestant churches in Germany, to bring them into alignment with the racist and nationalist ideology of the Nazis, and to organize them into a single imperial church (*Reichskirche*) under the authority of a single bishop appointed by Hitler. See Martin Heimbucher and Rudolf Weth, eds., *Die Barmer Theologische Erklärung: Einführung und Dokumentation*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Göttingen: Neukirchener, 2009). Those who supported the “Barmer Declaration” later organized into “the Confessing Church,” of which Schlink was a participant. His sermon, “Pflicht und Versuchung christlichen Bekenkens” [The Duty and Temptation in Christian Confessing], was published in *Bekennende Kirche und Welt: Vorträge und Predigten aus den Jahren 1934 bis 1945* [Confessing Church and World: Essays and Sermons from the Years 1934 to 1945], *Das christliche Deutschland 1933 bis 1945: Dokumente und Zeugnisse*, ed., Arbeitsgemeinschaft katholischer und evangelischer Christen, Evangelische Reihe, vol. 10 (Tübingen: Furcht, 1947), 9–26 (reprinted in AB 13–34).

17 For this account, see Peter Brunner, “Bericht von Prf Brunner,” in *Jahrbuch der Hessischen Kirchengeschichtlichen Vereinigung* 32 (1981), 495–503; Albrecht Peters, “Ringende Wahrheit” [Striving for the Unifying Truth], *Kerygma und Dogma* 29 (1983), 202; and

were forced back to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church as the authoritative witness to church doctrine, especially in a time of church conflict, and they found in them the means for theological resistance against the DC. After the war, the two theologians became close colleagues and friends in Heidelberg.

In the wake of Schlink's removal from the Giessen faculty, he was invited by the director of Bethel Institutions, Friedrich von Bodelschwingh the Younger (1877–1946), who had received positive reports about Schlink's theology and scholarship, to become an assistant professor (*Dozent*) of systematic theology at the seminary in Bethel, where Schlink had also briefly been a student.<sup>18</sup> He began his work there on 1 April 1935, following the departure of Hans-Wilhelm Schmidt (1903–91), the one theology faculty member there to have belonged to the Nazi Party. All of the newly called *Dozenten* at that time were members of the Confessing Church. At the Bethel Seminary Schlink worked alongside such notable individuals as Günther Bornkamm (1905–90), who taught New Testament, Georg Merz (1892–1959), who taught practical theology, and Robert Frick (1901–90), who taught church history. Offering courses and seminars on dogmatics, the Lutheran Confessions, ethics, philosophy, and issues in practical theology, Schlink also regularly preached at least three Sundays a month in local congregations or at the Bethel Hospital.<sup>19</sup> He later wrote that “praise of the Creator from the mouths of epileptics in the *Zionskirche* at Bethel opened for me new dimensions of theological thought.”<sup>20</sup> A product of his preaching during these years was a little book of sermons, *Der Erhöhte spricht*, which was the first of his writings to be translated into English.<sup>21</sup> He served in Bethel until March 1939, when the seminary was closed by the Gestapo.

Edmund Schlink, “Predigt in der Trauerfeier für D. Peter Brunner: Professor der Theologie, gehalten am Sonntag Rogate, dem 24. Mai 1981,” *Kerygma und Dogma* 28 (1982), 4.

18 For Schlink's activities at the Bethel seminary in the years 1935–39 and 1945–46, see Frank-Michael Kuhlemann, *Die kirchliche Hochschule Bethel. Grundzüge ihrer Entwicklung 1905–2005* [The Seminary Bethel. Principles of its Development 1905–2005], Schriften des Instituts für Diakonie- und Sozialgeschichte an der kirchlichen Hochschule Bethel, vol. 13, ed. Matthias Benad (Bielefeld: Bethel-Verlag, 2005), 53–55, 59–60, 74–81; and Gottfried Michaelis and Andreas Lindemann, *Lehren und Studieren in Bethel 1934 bis 1946* [Teaching and Studying in Bethel 1934 to 1946] (Bielefeld: Bethel-Verlag, 1999), 9–49.

19 Gottfried Michaelis, “Edmund Schlink's Jahre in Westfalen” [Edmund Schlink's Years in Westphalia], in *Lehren und Studieren in Bethel 1934 bis 1946*, ed. Michaelis and Lindemann, 15–19.

20 Quoted by Klaus Engelhardt in his sermon, “Trauergottesdienst für Edmund Schlink am 25. Mai 1984 in der Versöhnungskirche Heidelberg-Ziegelhausen gehalten von Landesbischof Dr. Klaus Engelhardt,” 6 (typescript; translated by Skibbe, *A Quiet Reformer*, 29). Dr. Engelhardt is Edmund Schlink's son-in-law and had been his student. He is the retired president of the EKD.

21 Edmund Schlink, *Der Erhöhte spricht: Eine Auslegung der sieben Worte Jesu am Kreuz und ausgewählter Worte des Auferstandenen* (Berlin: Furche, 1939; 2d ed., Tübingen: Furche, 1948; 3rd ed., Hamburg: Furche, 1954). ET of the third edition: *The Victor Speaks*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958).

During his years in Bethel he was also active as a theological advisor to the leaders of the Confessing Church in Westphalia and Hessen-Nassau. Toward this end, he had participated as a delegate in the meetings of the Confessing Church at Augsburg (1935) and Bad Oeynhausen (1936). In the struggle against the DC, Schlink and other pastors in the Confessing Church found themselves resisting Nazi ideas and practices in the church, while at the same time taking care not to be accused of overt political resistance against the Nazi regime. While many of the pastors in the Confessing Church had been able to avoid making an oath of loyalty to Hitler in 1934, they could not elude doing so in 1938, at least not if they wanted to stay in office and to provide for their families and congregations.<sup>22</sup> Schlink and the other leaders in their regional Confessing Church advised their pastors to make the oath.<sup>23</sup> Surely they did so, however, with the understanding (made clear in Barth's oath controversy), that the reference to "God" in the oath implied the subordination of the German Leader to the authority of the First Commandment. Despite having made the oath in 1938, Schlink was required to make a second oath to Hitler in December 1941, because of continued political suspicions about his activities.<sup>24</sup>

These years were especially difficult for him, not merely because of the church struggle against the DC and their ideology but also because of the death of his first wife, Elisabeth Winkelmann, who had been a fellow theology student in Münster. They had married in April 1932, but she died from an apparent heart attack in May 1936. After her devastating death, he had to care

22 In 1934 the national Bishop Ludwig Müller tried but failed to demand that all Protestant pastors in Germany make an oath of loyalty to Hitler. Four years later (April 1938) Friedrich Werner, the president of the Protestant High Church Council in Berlin, was able to order all pastors to make such an oath. Each pastor was required to say the following. "I swear: I will be faithful and obedient to Adolf Hitler, the leader of the German empire and people, that I will conscientiously observe the laws and carry out the duties of my office, so help me God" (see Angelika Gerlach-Praetorius, *Die Kirche vor der Eidesfrage: die Diskussion um den Pfarrereid im "Dritten Reich"* [The Church Faces the Issue of the Oath: Discussion of the Pastors' Oath in the "Third Reich"] [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967], 69).

23 It should be noted that in August 1934 Karl Barth also agreed to make the oath of loyalty to Hitler (identical in content to the 1938 oath) that was then required of all civil servants (e. g., university professors), provided he could add a phrase that limited his obedience "to the extent" that he could "be responsible as a Protestant Christian." After this request was rejected, and Barth had been suspended from teaching at Bonn, he made public the reason for his addition to the oath, namely, that no government is above the First Commandment. When the Reformed Alliance in Germany (a federation of Reformed churches in Germany) declared that for Christians the oath's reference to God "excluded any action that would be contrary to God's command as attested in Scripture," and when other members of the Confessing Church had publicly made the same point, Barth then agreed that he could make the oath without any qualification. By this time (Dec. 1934), however, his actions had raised suspicion among his superiors and he was dismissed from his university position by the Cologne administrative court. Cf. Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Biographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress), 255–58.

24 Cf. Skibbe, *A Quiet Reformer*, 44.

for their two young daughters, Johanna (b. 1933) and Dorothea (b. 1935). Two years later, in October 1938, he married Irmgard Ostwald (1914–2006), a former student of his who had also previously studied with Barth in her native Basel.<sup>25</sup> After her arrival at Bethel, Schlink had asked her if she would agree to type the first draft of the book he was then completing, on the theology of the Lutheran Confessions. She agreed and stayed on through the following summer to finish that project. (For relaxation she accompanied him on the piano, while he played his violin.) Toward the end of their collaboration he asked her to marry him. Together they had two children, Wilhelm (b. 1939) and Bernhard (b. 1944).<sup>26</sup> For almost fifty years Frau Schlink would give her husband invaluable theological counsel and support.

After the closure of the seminary in Bethel, Schlink became an official regional church counsellor (*Visitor*) of congregations in the Confessing Church in Hessen-Nassau. Many congregations there were without pastors, and so he was called upon to preach and care for several of them. Within a few months, however, his preaching had put him at odds again with the Gestapo and he was thus banned from speaking in public.<sup>27</sup> After a short stint as a missionary in Schleswig-Holstein, he returned to Westphalia, where he was called to serve as a wartime substitute pastor and a pastoral administrator to two congregations in Dortmund. During this time, he and his family lived in the household of the systematic theologian, Hans Joachim Iwand (1899–1960), who had been director of the Confessing Church's seminary in Blöstau and later in Bielefeld. Because of the frequent allied bombing raids, Frau Schlink and the children returned to Bethel after a few months. A short time later Schlink was called and appointed pastor of a congregation in Bielefeld, but the church authorities in Berlin, all members of the DC, blocked the appointment.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the elders of that Confessing Church congregation, the *Neustädter Marienkirche*, asked him to remain, despite the illegality of such an action. This he did through the end of the war.

Particularly strong and influential memories from this period were of experiences that brought him into close contact with Christians from other confessional traditions. "I could not forget the humble faces of the Orthodox female forced-laborers from Ukraine, who in Bielefeld stepped to the altar of the evangelical-Lutheran St. Mary's Church and to whom I could not deny the Sacrament."<sup>29</sup> He also could not forget the experience of officiating at funeral

25 Skibbe, *A Quiet Reformer*, 30.

26 While Wilhelm is an emeritus professor of art history at the University of Freiburg, Bernhard is an emeritus professor of law at Humboldt University, Berlin, and a world-famous novelist. See Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser* (Zurich: Diogenes, 1995; translated as *The Reader*, trans. Carol Brown Janeway [New York: Vintage, 1997]). This novel has been adapted into the award-winning film of the same title.

27 Eber, *Einheit*, 25.

28 Skibbe, *A Quiet Reformer*, 43.

29 Edmund Schlink, "Persönlicher Beitrag" [Personal Contribution] in *Männer der Ev. Kirche in*



services with the local Roman Catholic priest, as together they stood before the mass graves, after a devastating bombing raid. Reflecting later on these various experiences, Schlink wrote:

Was that only the experience of an extreme situation [*Grenzsituation*, lit. “a border situation”], which is meaningless for normal church life and for the dogmatic understanding of the church? Or was it even a mistake? Or is there not much more the responsibility to think about that which in those days broke open for us in an elementary way with every sign of a truly spiritual inevitability, and to do so with thorough care for its ecclesiological significance and to maintain awareness of it in the engagement with the Confessions? What shines as the truth in extreme situations in the church cannot become false in normal situations, even if it cannot be repeated in the same way.<sup>30</sup>

Schlink would set forth similar thoughts in his book of postwar reflections about “the outcome of the church struggle”:

In the crisis of oppression Christians sought out other Christians, not only in one's home congregation, but also among those scattered about in prisons and in open fields. That a person could be Christ to another, that Christ was present in the mutual consolation of the brothers and sisters, that was the rediscovery of the church.... This discovery was not limited to one's own church confession.... In this discovery of sisters and brothers in other Christian confessions, the differences between them were not annulled, but the accents were shifted and oppositions disappeared over against the reality of the Lord, who is greater than our understanding and more gracious than any dogma of grace. Greater than the differences was the power of the name of Jesus Christ we witnessed to together. We will never be able to forget, that in great need of the gospel's consolation, we heard it from brothers and sisters who belonged to churches in which the pure teaching of the gospel is obscured.... We began... to listen to each other and learn from each other in new ways, to admonish and to warn each other. And it became increasingly clear that none of us could speak and act from one's own confessional position without carefully thinking through and really listening to the voices of the brothers and sisters from the other confession.<sup>31</sup>

While serving in Bielefeld, he was also called to be the director of studies at the *Thomasstift* in Strasbourg, where the Lutheran Church in Alsace educated its pastors. From May 1943 until the Allied armies captured the city in September 1944, he spent half of a month teaching seminary students there and the other half ministering to his congregation 250 miles away. Not surprising, the

*Deutschland. Eine Festschrift für Kurt Scharf zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Heinrich Vogel (Berlin und Stuttgart: Lettner, 1962), 206.

30 Schlink, “Persönlicher Beitrag,” 206–7 (cf. Eber, “Edmund Schlink 1903–84,” xiii–xiv; the translation here differs slightly from that of Skibbe, *A Quiet Reformer*, 49).

31 Edmund Schlink, *Der Ertrag des Kirchenkampfes* [The Outcome of the Church Struggle], 2d ed. (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1947), 19–20, and 39. This essay has been reprinted in AB 69–121.

students were “amazingly alert and focused on what was most essential.”<sup>32</sup> Several months earlier he had discussed his situation with Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45) in a meeting in Berlin.<sup>33</sup> Bonhoeffer informed him that individuals in the German Military High Command had concluded that Germany could not win the war. He advised Schlink not to take up residence in Strasbourg. Only after the war would Schlink learn of Bonhoeffer’s involvement in the circle of conspirators in the German Military Intelligence Office (*Abwehr*) who had attempted to assassinate Hitler.

Although Schlink opposed the actions of the DC and was a member of the Confessing Church, he also sought to remain a responsible German citizen *and* a faithful Christian pastor in the context of a totalitarian dictatorship. From the perspective of the present, given what people now know about the Third Reich and its nihilistic, destructive, and evil actions, it is difficult to understand the problems, complexities, and burdens that Schlink and other pastors in the Confessing Church faced between 1934 and the end of the war. Contrary to the above statement by Schlink that the “church struggle” (*Kirchenkampf*) forced Christians to listen carefully to others from differing confessional traditions, the Confessing Church was never very united theologically, let alone politically. The pressure and power that the Nazi regime exerted against its citizenry through its state security and the ever present threat of public denunciation and imprisonment certainly had their effect as well. Still, some today may wonder why Schlink and other pastors in the Confessing Church did not more openly criticize a government they had come to deplore. Clearly his decision not to pursue political resistance against the Nazi state put him in a different place from the course that Bonhoeffer and few others took. Schlink’s primary concerns were to continue Christ’s ministry of word and sacrament to the people who had called him to be their pastor and to stand with the true church of Christ over against the false (the *Nicht-Kirche*). The concern for his young family also had to have been a factor in guiding his words and actions in this difficult, turbulent period.

After the war, Schlink was among those who preached a strong word of national and ecclesial repentance:

Just as great as the guilt of the political leadership is the guilt of those church leaders and pastors, who like the false prophets of the Old Testament cried, “God is with us,” when God had already long been against us, and who proclaimed God’s blessing when they should have threatened God’s judgment, who applauded when they should have been silent, and who were silent when they should have given warning. They accommodated God’s commandments to the totalitarian claims of political power, whose commands were proclaimed as God’s commands and whose actions as God’s

32 Edmund Schlink, “Vortrag von Prof. Edmund Schlink im Ökumenischen Studentenheim am ‘Hausabend,’” 7; quoted in Skibbe, *A Quiet Reformer*, 46. For Schlink’s activities in Strasbourg, see also Michaelis, “Edmund Schlinks Jahre in Westfalen,” 23–24.

33 Skibbe, *A Quiet Reformer*, 45–46.

actions. They perceived an arbitrary independence in political actions, the administration of justice, and the waging of war that does not belong to them, and they have failed to measure them clearly and openly against the norm of the divine Word. I am speaking here not only of those German Christians who mixed up Christ and Hitler in the most amazing way, who persecuted the true church by denouncing its preachers and congregation members, and who helped to make possible the persecution of Jews by rejecting the Old Testament. I am thinking here also of the others who thought they could preach the gospel without proclaiming the divine law, who thought they could nurture a pious inwardness, without calling out publicly from the rooftops God's claim on all, and who still excused and hoped when the stones already cried out for God's thundering fist. I am thinking of the many whose highest principle was to preserve the church and their own office by compromise and silence, who in secret rejected National Socialism, but in public "joyfully affirmed" it. They have falsely interpreted Romans 13 and kept secret the wisdom, "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29).<sup>34</sup>

Schlink's self-critical attitude toward the church would remain an essential feature of his theology for the rest of his life.

### Heidelberg

After the end of the war, Schlink briefly served as the Director of the preacher's seminary in Brackwede, also near Bielefeld, and taught one course ("The Doctrine of the Church") and two seminars ("Justification" and "Luther's *Freedom of the Christian*") in the reopened Bethel Seminary. He also published a little work on "the theological problem of music."<sup>35</sup> By this time he had become well known in German theological circles, not merely because of his actions against the DC but also as a result of the publication of his first major work, *The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, which has been a standard introduction to these writings right up to the present day.<sup>36</sup> This work as a whole stresses the importance of confessing the faith in the midst of spiritual attacks and trials (*Anfechtungen*) and the persecution of the church. It clearly underscores the centrality of the distinction between law and gospel for the articulation of *all* of the articles of faith. Every essential doctrine of the Christian faith dare not be taught independently of this distinction, that is,

34 Schlink, *Bekennende Kirche und Welt*, 117–18. During the Second World War German soldiers wore belt buckles that stated "Gott mit uns," God with us.

35 Edmund Schlink, *Zum Theologischen Problem der Musik* [On the Theological Issue of Music] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1945; 2d. ed., 1950; reprinted in AB 147–69).

36 Edmund Schlink, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1940; 2d. ed. 1946; 3rd ed. 1948; 4th ed. 1954; ET of the third edition: *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J. A. Bouman [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961, reprinted by Concordia Publishing House, 2003]). The fourth edition has been reprinted in SÖB, vol. 4 (abbreviated hereafter as TLB).